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Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Deficit Mitigation Plan and the Impact of the Governor's Rescissions on the After School Grant Program, December 9, 2009

AfterSchool funding is vital in the fight to narrow the academic performance gap between low-income and minority youth and their peers in the State of Connecticut, which has the largest academic performance gap in the nation according to both the U.S. Department of Education's biennial "National Assessment of Educational Progress" and the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now.

The Norwalk Housing Authority oversees the housing needs for the families of an estimated 15% of Norwalk's school age children. For the past 10 years we have operated After School Learning Centers to serve these children. The children come from families whose average annual income is approximately \$18,000. 85% of public housing families are sole parent households, headed by women who are struggling to make ends meet and help their children move on to productive futures.

We believe that the youth of this State will find stable employment in the new economic environment only if they can read. For the past two years, the Connecticut After School Grant Program has funded a critically important cornerstone of the Learning Center program at the Housing Authority and yielded striking positive results. Over the past two years, the Connecticut After School Grant has allowed us to create an innovative literacy program. Youth at the centers participated in baseline assessments of their reading skills in fall 2008, winter 2009 and June 2009. 67% of the students assessed showed improvement in their reading skills by winter and 74% showed improvement by June 2009, a significant indicator of success as a majority of the youth were not reading at grade level when first tested. The Connecticut After School Grant has allowed us to create new jobs, hiring certified teachers as Reading Coaches for children. Coaches and Center staff received training in comprehensive reading instruction from Dr. Margie Gillis of Haskins Laboratories and Literacy How, Inc., the education research and consulting organizations affiliated with Yale University.

This base of After School state funding is instrumental in leveraging match funding from local partners. For example, matching grants were received in 2009 from United Way to provide math and science instructors, nutrition education and college scholarships for public housing residents. A primary goal of the After School Centers at the Norwalk Housing Authority is to increase the number of youth interested in pursuing a college degree. In 2008, a survey showed that 43% of youth ages 12-18 attending the Centers had a desire to attend college. For the March 2009 survey, that number had risen to 58.5%. Clearly, youth are benefitting from Center support and encouragement in the area of academic success. Twenty-six (26) college scholarships were awarded to Norwalk Housing Authority residents in June 2009 through over \$100,000 in matching college scholarship funding by local partners.

From a cost benefit standpoint, successful youth become successful adults who, rather than requiring subsidy by the state, will bring millions into the State economy as consumers and taxpayers.

None of the above would be possible without the state After School base funding upon which Center curriculum is based.

We recently completed an application for 2010 After School funding. In addition to continuing the successful literacy program, the Norwalk Housing Authority will partner with Family & Children's Agency on Parent Engagement, focusing on the families of youth who are making the critical transition from middle school to high school, and offer workshops centered on healthy life choices for youth as well as case management for at-risk youth.

Funding by the State of Connecticut for urban youth violence prevention has already been cut. We urge you to preserve and extend After School funding because any cut will disproportionately impact children of this State's lowest income families. Without After School support, more children are likely to drop out of school and into a bleak future as jobs require more and more educational skills. Without your help, these children could become the future unemployable burdens of this State, turning to paths that include gangs, drug trafficking and violence.

Dealing with such activities will incur far more cost for the State of Connecticut than providing After School funding now.